

Mr. LEVIN. I very much thank my friend from Utah.

EXTENSION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I think we have a basic obligation to provide relief to Americans who have lost their jobs. This is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of this Congress. The extension of unemployment benefits today for an additional 13 weeks is a way of carrying out that obligation.

We are all aware of the increase in the number of Americans who have lost their jobs as a result of this recession. Every one of our States is feeling it. Michigan alone has over 300,000 workers who have lost their jobs, and that number, as the numbers in many of our States, is likely to continue to rise in the coming months.

I am terribly disappointed we could not agree on an economic stimulus package, but that is no excuse for failing to address the plight of Americans who have lost their jobs. Extending unemployment benefits is not just about doing what is right and doing what is equitable and doing what is fair; it is elementary economics. It is common sense. Providing additional unemployment benefits is a very good economic stimulus.

The Department of Labor has found that for every dollar invested in unemployment insurance, we generate \$2.15 for our gross domestic product. So putting money into the hands of people who need it, we are also putting money into the hands of people who are going to spend it. That helps our economy. That helps create jobs.

I congratulate Senator DASCHLE for offering this legislation today, and I hope now that the House will promptly pass it.

I thank my friend from Utah.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

INABILITY TO ACT

Mr. BENNETT. The Chamber seems to be filled with congratulatory messages. We are congratulating ourselves that we have finally acted, when, in fact, all we have done is the least possible, minimum, lowest common denominator kind of action, and we have demonstrated our inability to act on any kind of visionary plan.

The majority leader says he will be happy to bring this subject up again if there is an indication that we can get something upon which we can agree. There is an indication that we can get something upon which we can agree, that we can get something that is a compromise, that we can get something that cuts across party lines. That is the proposal made by the Centrist Coalition.

I have been a member of the Centrist Coalition, and its predecessor names of the group, ever since I came to the

Senate in 1993. We started out holding meetings in Senator John Chafee's hideaway. John Chafee was the founder of this group. He said, let's reach across party lines and see if we can't put partisanship aside and come up with some kind of a solution. We have had our good moments. We have had our disappointing moments. But we have hung together as a group, even as the membership has changed in the years since I have been here.

The Centrist Coalition, involving Democrats and Republicans, involving people of very strong positions on the liberal side of issues and very strong positions on the conservative side of issues, have said: For the good of the country, let's see if we can't fashion a package that makes sense. And the majority leader will not allow a vote on that package.

He will not allow us even to debate it. He will not allow us to bring it up. He will not allow people who were not part of the Centrist Coalition to offer amendments. Then as he shuts the process down, he says: I am open to any suggestion from anybody. I will take him at his word, and I have a suggestion for him. I say to the majority leader, bring up the Centrist Coalition stimulus package backed by Republicans as well as Democrats. Put it on the floor and allow it to be amended by those who say it isn't wonderful; allow the normal parliamentary procedure to go forward; and then allow it to come to a vote.

I suggest to you that if the majority leader really believes we need a stimulus package, if he is really true to his word that he is open to any suggestion, if he really does want to move in this direction, that is the way he should go. But he has not allowed that. He has not allowed a vote. Let us understand that.

There is a proposal. It is not a series of rehashed tax ideas, as the Senator from Rhode Island suggested, about some of the things people on this aisle wanted to put in. It is something worked out by a group of Republicans and Democrats acting in good faith and in consultation with the White House—reaching out beyond the Congress to get the opinion of the President of the United States, and receiving from the President the comment that, well, it is not exactly what I want but I would be willing to sign it.

It seems to me this is an extraordinary moment in cooperation, reaching out, and resolution that the majority leader will not allow to come up. This is an extraordinary opportunity which the majority leader will not allow to happen.

I hope the majority leader reconsiders. I hope he recognizes that taking a strong partisan position on one side, or taking a strong partisan position on the other side, has been proven ineffective; that he recognizes that there are those of us who have spent time talking to each other across the aisle outside of the partisan straitjacket who have reached out in an effort to find a

compromise that makes sense, who have crafted something that we think will pass and the President has indicated he will sign, and that this is available to the majority leader and to the country if the majority leader will simply allow it to come to a vote.

Mr. President, as you and others know, my father served in this body for 24 years. My first experience here was sitting up in the family gallery as a teenager watching the Senate operate as I tried to understand it. My father said something that was very profound. When people would say to him, why didn't you do this or why didn't you do that, he would say: We legislate at the highest level at which we can obtain a majority.

I think there is a majority for the centrist package. I ask the majority leader to let us find out.

NEED FOR AN ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, over four months after the idea was originally proposed, the Senate remains divided on an economic stimulus package.

Much has changed since an economic stimulus was first proposed in response to the September 11 attacks. Both the stock markets and the economy have proved to be more resilient than economists had expected.

Moreover, there are signs, as Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told the Budget Committee last month, that some of the forces that have been restraining the economy over the past year are starting to loosen their strangle hold. The Fed Chairman told the Committee that "while 3 months ago, [a stimulus package] was clearly a desirable action . . . I do not think it is a critically important issue to do. I think the economy will recover in any event."

Aside from the positive economic data that have been released by government agencies in recent weeks, there is already a significant amount of stimulus in the pipelines.

That's not to say that we are home free. As Chairman Greenspan pointed out last month, the economy could go either way at this point. Most troubling is the higher unemployment rate since last year.

However, we must not delude ourselves into thinking that an economic stimulus package—whether crafted by Democrats or Republicans—is some sort of panacea. Stimulus packages can't work miracles. We have a \$10 trillion economy. That's gross domestic product—the total of all spending. We cannot flip the economy over like a pancake. A boost of \$70 billion to \$100 billion would amount to less than 1 percent of GDP.

Nobody can say at this point with certainty in which direction the economy is headed.

What we know is that, since the recession began last March, the Labor Department reports that 1.8 million